
References

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OBITUARY**Denis Frank Owen, MA, PhD, DSc, FLS**

Denis Owen died of cancer on 3 October 1996. He was an enthusiastic field naturalist and a prolific writer, publishing some 250 scientific papers, ten books and numerous articles in many different publications. Besides his intellectual and academic achievements he maintained an insatiable zest for field natural history, operating the m.v. traps in his rural Oxfordshire garden to within three days of his death.

While still at school he joined the London Natural History Society and quickly impressed the senior members of the Society. He took a prominent part in the Society's ecological survey of the bombed sites of central London, publishing his first entomological paper *The macrolepidoptera of the Moorgate, London, bombed sites* (*Entomologist* **82**: 59-62) in 1949. Later that year he was called-up for National Service with the Royal Army Ordnance Corps. He was fortunate in some ways that he spent most of his two years' service in isolated camps adjacent to the Solway Firth, thus giving him splendid opportunities to familiarise himself with the rich wildlife to be found there, especially the northern species of Lepidoptera. It was here that he captured and described in 1952 a new aberration, *inocellata* Owen, of *Erebia aethiops* (Esper) (*Entomologist* **85**: 92).

Towards the end of his army service he was invited by Dr David Lack, Director of the Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology at Oxford University, to work with him on the ecology of titmice, grey herons, rooks and swifts, on which he published several papers in his own right. He maintained unabated, however, his interest in entomology, studying insect migration with the writer in south-west France in 1953, for example, and continuing to publish prolifically on the subject.

In 1956 he was given a belated opportunity to read for an Honours Degree in zoology at Oxford and after graduating in 1958 he went to the USA to take up a lectureship at the University of Michigan, gaining his doctorate there in 1961. He became well-known in entomological and ornithological circles in the United States as papers continued to flow steadily from his pen, including four on industrial melanism in North American moths. His first

contribution to the *Entomologist's Record* was published in 1950 and his last one early in 1996 was also concerned with melanism, in *Biston betularia* L. (108: 23).

In June 1962 he took up a lectureship in Zoology at Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda. This new appointment enabled him to extend his interest to the African tropics, especially the genetics and population ecology of butterflies and snails. In 1966 his first book, *Animal Ecology in Tropical Africa*, was published. That year a move to West Africa as Professor of Zoology at the University of Sierra Leone enabled him to expand his studies to that region, and eventually led to the publication of his internationally acclaimed book *Tropical Butterflies* (1971).

In late 1973 Denis returned to the UK to become Principle Lecturer in the Department of Biology at the Oxford Polytechnic, now Oxford Brookes University, where he introduced research to what was then a predominantly teaching institution. Apart from his academic work he contributed frequently to magazines such as the *New Scientist* and *Country Life*, and to BBC radio.

Barely two weeks before he died Owen received an honorary DSc. from his university, bravely making a humorous acceptance speech although in considerable discomfort. He retired in April 1996 and was looking forward to completing some of his outstanding long-term research projects, such as the genetics and population ecology of *Biston betularia*, the evolution and mimetic relationships of African butterflies, the evolutionary history of the butterflies of the Atlantic Islands and an evaluation of the work of the founder of the *Record*, J.W. Tutt. A paper shortly to be published posthumously completed his work on *Callimorpha dominula* L., in which he followed on the early work begun at Cothill by the late E.B. Ford.

Denis Owen had a magnetic personality combined with prodigious intellectual and physical strength, and packed more into his 65 years than most would in a hundred. Although outspoken he tempered it with an infectious sense of humour. His love and command of the English language, backed up as it was by extensive reading by no means confined to natural history, made him an excellent communicator and broadcaster. His name will be perpetuated in those insects named after him: a West African hawkmoth *Phylloxiphia oweni* and a whole genus of Ichneumonids, *Owenus*. He will be remembered with great affection. We offer our sympathy to his first wife, Jennifer, their son and daughter, and his second wife, Clare.

A Denis Owen Memorial Fund has been set up c/o the Linnean Society of London, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1V 0LQ.

John F. Burton

D.F. Owen, RIP

The committal service for the late Denis Owen took place on 10 October 1996 at Oxford Crematorium, which is on the road which leads out from